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Common students' problems and interventions to enhance students' well-being

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify and analyze the most common problems experienced by students of Divine Word College of Laoag (DWCL) through the administration of the Inventory of Common Problems (ICP) mandated by the Office of the Fr. President. Data were collected from 1,753 participants between November 18, 2024, and February 11, 2025, using both Google Forms and in-person interviews. A total of 1,658 valid responses (94.58%) were analyzed. Responses were rated using a Likert scale to determine levels of distress, worry, and bother across six domains: academic problems, depression, anxiety, physical health problems, interpersonal problems, and substance use. The highest concern was academic problems (M=1.9915), followed closely by anxiety (M=1.8844), physical health issues (M=1.8770), and depression (M=1.8413). Interpersonal problems (M=1.5994) and substance use (M=1.1045) scored lower but remained relevant. Findings highlight the strong link between academic stress, mental health, and physical well-being, suggesting the need for holistic interventions. This study provides empirical evidence to guide the institution in improving student support systems, contributing to the broader discourse on student welfare in the Philippine higher education context.

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Introduction

The well-being of students in higher education is a critical determinant of both academic performance and personal development. Within the Philippine context, students often face a multifaceted set of challenges that extend beyond academics to include mental health, physical health, and social relationships (David et al., 2021; Serrano et al., 2023). This research responds to the institutional

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directive of the president of Divine Word College of Laoag to conduct an Inventory of Common Problems (ICP), providing evidence-based insight to strengthen support mechanisms for student success.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study draws on Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) Model (Astin, 1993), which posits that student outcomes are shaped not only by personal attributes (inputs) but also by the institutional environment and learning experiences. The ICP serves as a diagnostic tool to assess environmental stressors that might hinder student success. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) also underpins the study, emphasizing how individuals perceive and respond to stressors in their environment. When academic and personal challenges are left unaddressed, students' coping resources may be depleted, leading to poorer academic outcomes and reduced well-being.

Furthermore, the study acknowledges the Bio-Psycho-Social Model (Engel, 1977), recognizing that students' challenges are rarely isolated; rather, they often emerge from the interplay of biological health, psychological states, and social environments (Uy et al., 2022; Cabalza et al., 2022). In the local context, socio-economic pressures, family expectations, and cultural attitudes toward education and mental health further shape the lived experiences of students (Serrano et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on student well-being, several research gaps remain evident. Many existing studies in the Philippine context focus narrowly on specific aspects such as academic stress or mental health, often overlooking the interrelated nature of academic, psychological, physical, and social challenges (David et al., 2021; Serrano et al., 2023). Furthermore, localized institutional studies that provide context-specific data for private higher education institutions, particularly in Northern Luzon, are scarce (Cabalza et al., 2022). Research has also tended to emphasize descriptive prevalence rates rather than applying theoretical models that explain how stressors interact to influence students' coping strategies, academic outcomes, and overall well-being (Uy et al., 2022).

This study set out to fill existing gaps by looking closely at the common problems students face at Divine Word College of Laoag, using the Inventory of Common Problems (ICP) as its main tool. The goal was not only to gather evidence-based insights but also to use these findings to improve institutional support systems and shape student services and policies. More importantly, the study contributes to a wider conversation on holistic student development. In doing so, it reflects the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED, 2020) commitment to nurturing the academic, psychological, physical, and social well-being of students in Philippine higher education. By carefully documenting and analyzing these challenges, the research both serves the needs of the institution and adds to national discussions on student welfare, supporting CHED's vision of holistic growth in higher education.

Review of related literature and studies

The challenges faced by college students are multi-dimensional, spanning academic, mental, physical, social, and behavioral domains. Recent studies highlight the interconnectedness of these domains, showing that difficulties in one area often affect others, which underscores the need for holistic student

support programs. Filipino students, in particular, navigate a unique blend of academic pressures, family expectations, and socio-economic constraints, making a localized understanding essential.

Academic problems

Academic stress consistently emerges as the most pressing concern among Filipino college students. High workloads, frequent deadlines, and rigorous grading contribute significantly to heightened stress levels (David et al., 2021; Alibudbud, 2021). Laguador (2022) observed that students frequently struggle to balance academic demands with extracurricular activities, part-time work, and family responsibilities. This juggling act can lead to chronic worry, fatigue, and a decline in academic performance. In medical education, Ballebas et al. (2024) found that first- and third-year students reported compromised sleep quality and physical symptoms, such as headaches and fatigue, linked directly to academic stress, illustrating the strong mind–body connection in student well-being. These findings support the notion that interventions must address workload management and provide practical study skills workshops, time management training, and academic counseling.

Mental health: Anxiety and depression

Mental health concerns, particularly anxiety, and depression, are strongly associated with academic pressures. According to Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression, maladaptive thinking patterns triggered by academic failures or perceived inadequacy can lead to persistent sadness, loss of motivation, and social withdrawal (Beck, 1976; Serrano et al., 2023). In the Philippine higher education context, students may recognize mental health services but often underutilize them due to stigma, cultural norms, or time constraints (Alibanga et al., 2024). Juchniewicz et al. (2024) highlighted that access to counseling services and awareness of mental health resources are critical in preventing stress from escalating into severe depression or anxiety.

Philippine studies corroborate that academic load and personal expectations strongly correlate with heightened anxiety levels (David et al., 2021; Alibudbud, 2021). Serrano et al. (2023) further demonstrated that social support from family, peers, and mentors acts as a protective factor, reducing the severity of depressive and anxious symptoms. This underscores the importance of culturally sensitive mental health interventions that integrate individual coping strategies with institutional support systems, such as peer counseling programs, wellness workshops, and stress management seminars.

Physical health problems

The interplay between mental and physical health among students is well-documented. Chronic stress and anxiety often manifest through fatigue, headaches, digestive issues, and sleep disturbances (Cabalza et al., 2022; Uy et al., 2022; Ballebas et al., 2024). Filipino students often face additional challenges, including poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles, which can exacerbate stress responses (Uy et al., 2022). Cabalza et al. (2022) emphasized that students who engage in regular physical activity and maintain adequate sleep report lower stress levels and better overall well-being. These findings suggest that wellness programs targeting exercise, sleep hygiene, and nutrition should be integrated into student support services. Programs combining physical health education with mental health awareness can address both somatic and psychological outcomes of stress, reflecting a biopsychosocial approach.

Interpersonal problems

While academic and mental health concerns are predominant, interpersonal difficulties can also influence students' emotional and academic outcomes. Conflicts with peers, faculty, and family members may indirectly affect stress levels and academic performance (Cleofas, 2019; Santos & Pimentel, 2021). In the Philippine context, strong family ties may function both as sources of support and as sources of pressure, with high expectations for academic achievement contributing to stress, particularly among students from families with limited resources (Serrano et al., 2023). Programs that enhance conflict resolution, communication skills, and peer support networks can help students navigate interpersonal challenges and strengthen resilience.

Substance use

Substance use among Filipino college students remains relatively low compared to Western populations, but is still a concern when it emerges as a coping mechanism for stress (Villanueva & Cruz, 2021; Aliganga et al., 2024). Even occasional substance use can negatively impact academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and campus safety. Alibanga et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of preventive education, including mental health literacy, awareness campaigns, and accessible counseling services to mitigate risk. Early intervention strategies and student engagement in health-promoting activities can further reduce the likelihood of substance misuse.

Across these six domains, a clear pattern emerges: academic problems act as the primary stressor, often triggering mental health challenges, which may manifest physically and influence interpersonal relationships. This cyclical interaction underscores the necessity of holistic, multi-dimensional interventions (David et al., 2021; Alibudbud, 2021; Lim et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that integrated support programs combining academic assistance, mental health literacy, wellness promotion, and counseling services yield the most sustainable improvements in student outcomes (Juchniewicz et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2024).

The relevance of the Inventory of Common Problems (ICP) in identifying the most pressing concerns among Filipino students is validated. Addressing these interconnected stressors systematically enables institutions like DWCL to enhance student well-being, academic success, and long-term retention, aligning with CHED's thrust toward holistic higher education (Alibudbud, 2021; Serrano et al.,

Statement of the problem

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. **What is the level of concern experienced by students across the following domains:**
   - **1.1. Academic problems;**
   - **1.2. Depression;**
   - **1.3. Anxiety;**
   - **1.4. Physical health problems;**
   - **1.5. Interpersonal problems, and**
   - **1.6. Substance use problem?**

2. **What institutional intervention can be derived to enhance students' well-being?**

Conceptual framework

The framework guiding this study is grounded in the interaction between student challenges and institutional responses, following the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) logic model.

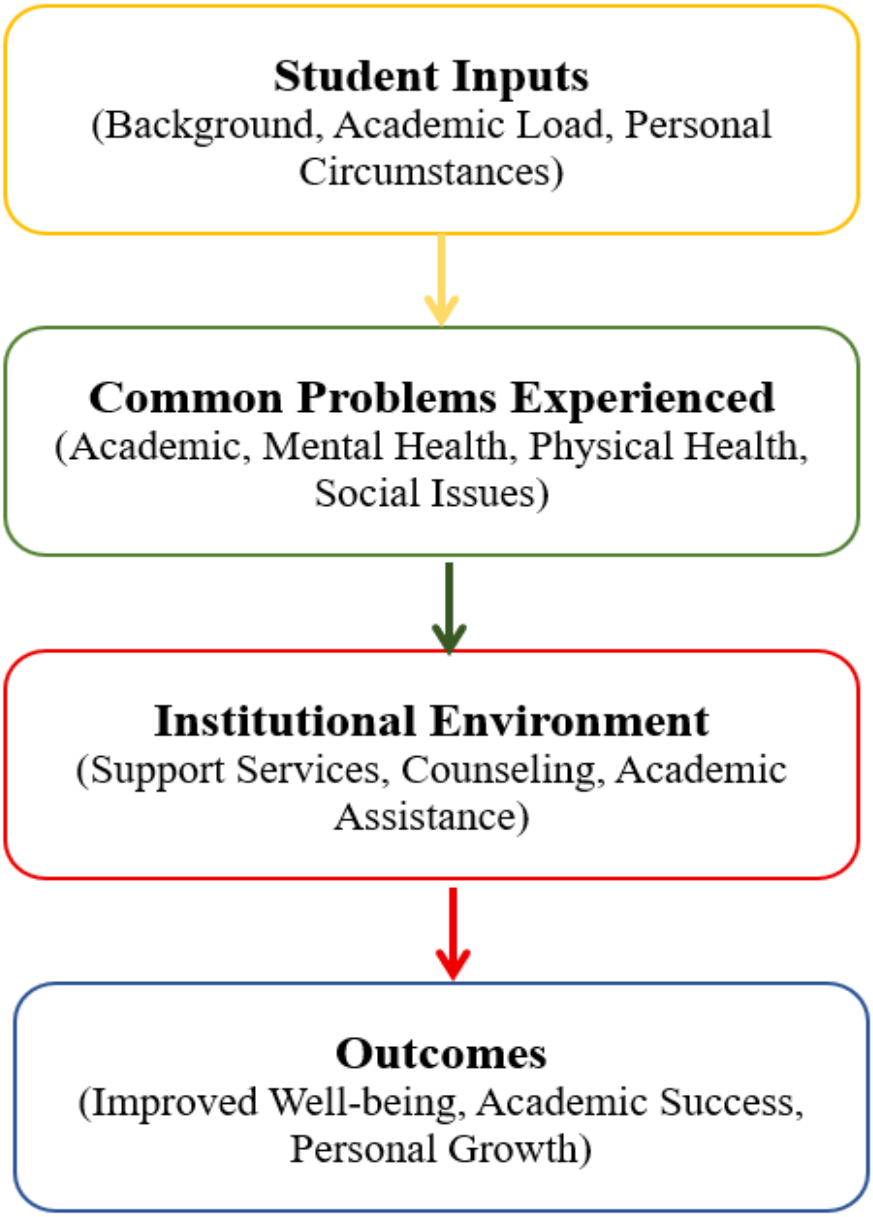


Figure 1. Simple conceptual framework of the study. The diagram shows how student circumstances lead to challenges, which the school addresses through support services, resulting in improved well-being, success, and retention.

Research methodology

This chapter presents the research design, sources of data which includes the locale of the study, population and sampling, data gathering instrument, data gathering procedure and data analysis including its ethical standards.

Research design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to systematically identify and analyze the most common problems encountered by the students of Divine Word College of Laoag (DWCL). The descriptive approach is appropriate because the primary aim is to determine the prevalence and severity of specific concerns without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Descriptive research enables the accurate portrayal of characteristics of a population, making it suitable for generating baseline data that can inform institutional interventions (David et al., 2021; Alibudbud, 2021).

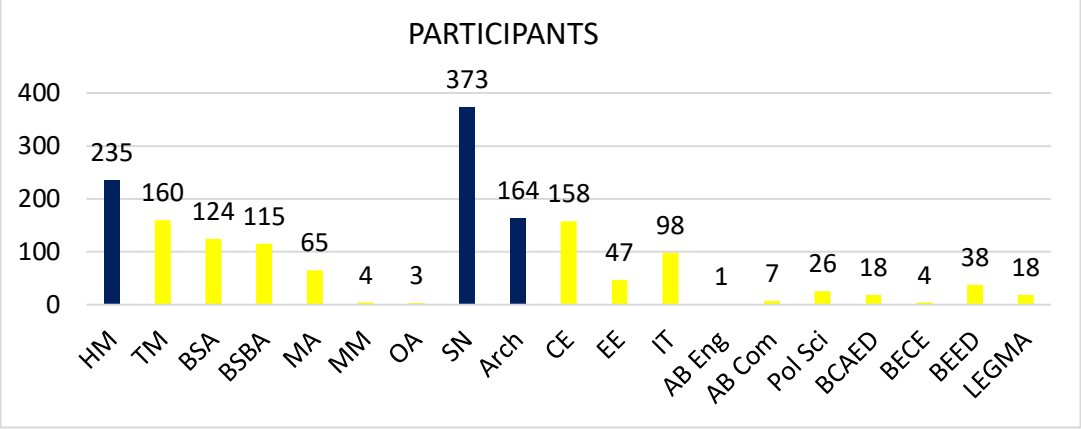
The Inventory of Common Problems (ICP), originally developed for academic counseling settings, was adapted to the local context and administered both digitally and face-to-face (Laguador, 2022; Ballebas et al., 2024). A cross-sectional survey design captured a snapshot of the student population's experiences within a defined period — November 18, 2025, to February 11, 2025 (Serrano et al., 2023).

Locale of the study

The study was conducted at Divine Word College of Laoag, Inc., a private educational institution located in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. The focus was on identifying the common problems experienced by students.

Population and sampling

The population of the study consisted of 1,753 college students enrolled in different academic programs. All students were required to complete the inventory of common problems using a standardized Google Form questionnaire. Since the instrument was administered uniformly and participation covered the entire student body, the study used a total population sampling, allowing comprehensive representation of both large and small programs. The inclusion of all respondents ensured that the results are reliable and reflective of the overall student population.



Data gathering instrument

The study ensured participant anonymity. Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the President of Divine Word College of Laoag and subsequently relayed to the respective deans for implementation. For the printed surveys, responses were carefully encoded into a secure database, while digital responses collected via Google Forms were automatically consolidated. Both sets of data were then merged for analysis after thorough verification to remove duplicates and incomplete entries, ensuring accuracy and integrity of the dataset.

Data gathering procedure

The ICP was administered in two formats: digital (Google Forms) and printed surveys. Informed consent forms were provided, and ethical clearance was secured from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (Lim et al., 2024). The dual-format administration ensured maximum accessibility and compliance with institutional protocols (David et al., 2021).

Data analysis tool

Descriptive statistics determined mean scores and standard deviations for each domain. Rankings identified the most pressing concerns among students. Microsoft Excel and SPSS were used for computation and graphical representation (Ballebas et al., 2024; Serrano et al., 2023).

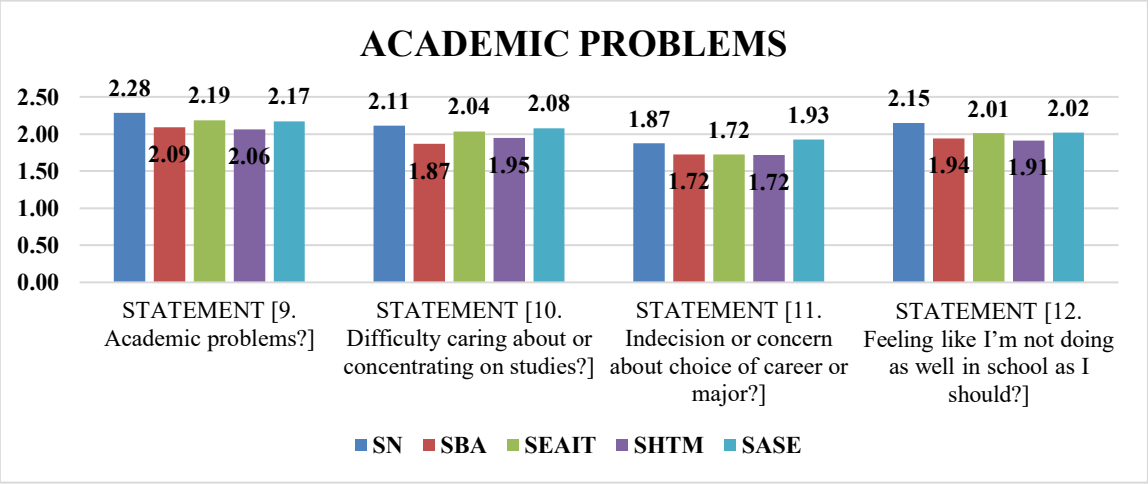
Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly upheld throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. All data were securely stored and utilized solely for academic purposes.

Data presentation and analysis

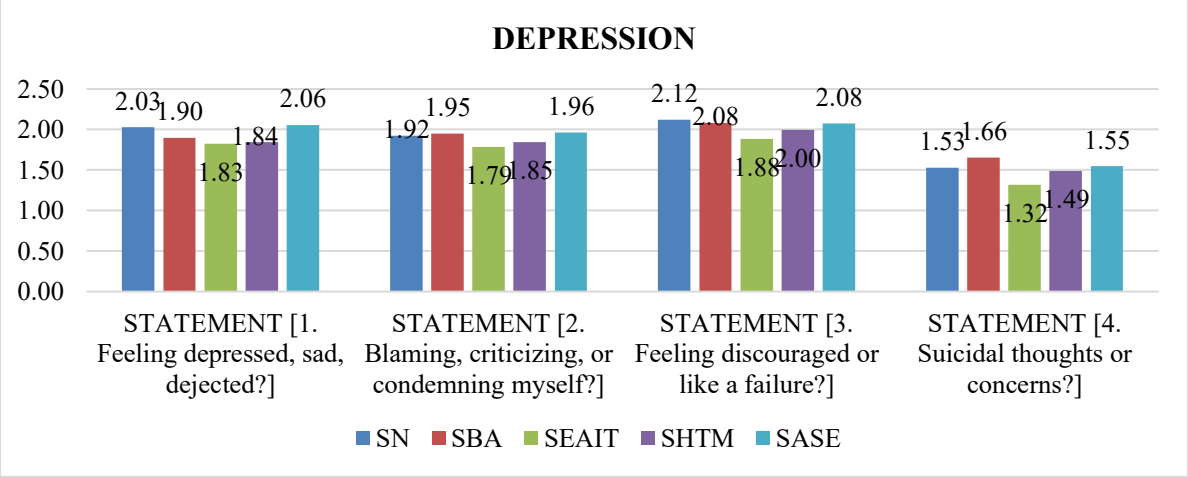
SOP 1: What is the level of concern experienced by students across the following domains:

1.1 ***Academic problems***



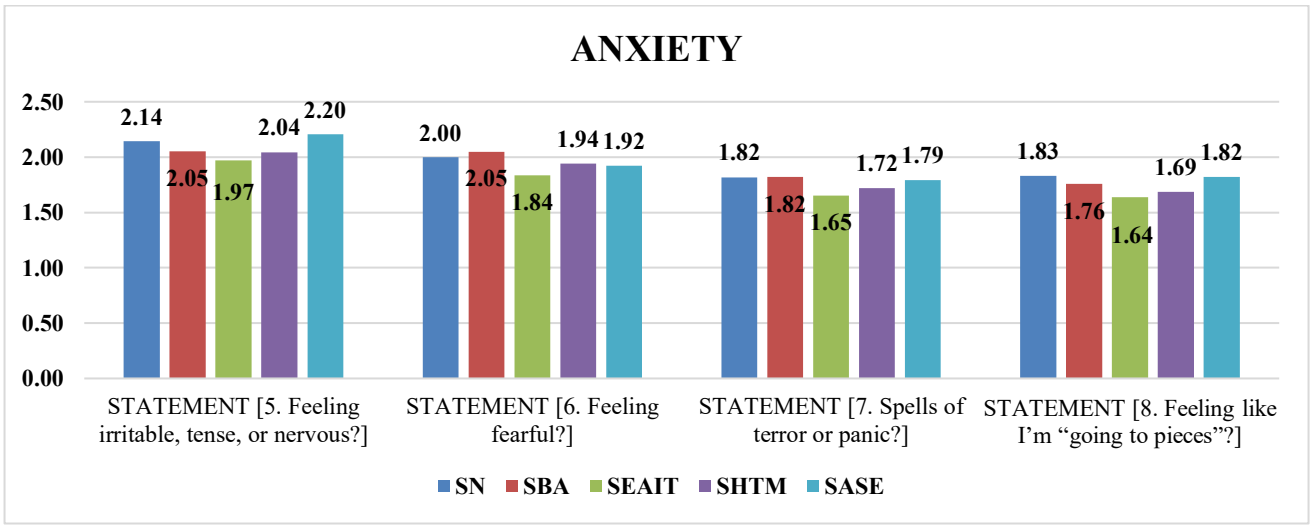
The chart shows that SN students report the highest academic challenges across all four areas, especially in general academic problems (2.28), difficulty concentrating on studies (2.11), and feeling they are underperforming (2.15). SBA students consistently report the fewest concerns, with the lowest scores in academic problems (2.09), difficulty concentrating (1.87), and career indecision (1.72), suggesting they experience fewer academic difficulties. Career indecision is the least concerning issue among students, with the lowest scores from SBA, SEAIT, and SHTM (all at 1.72), while many feel they are not performing as well as they should, with scores ranging from 1.91 (SHTM) to 2.15 (SN). Overall, the data suggest that academic stress and performance concerns are widespread, with some variation among schools.

1.2 Depression



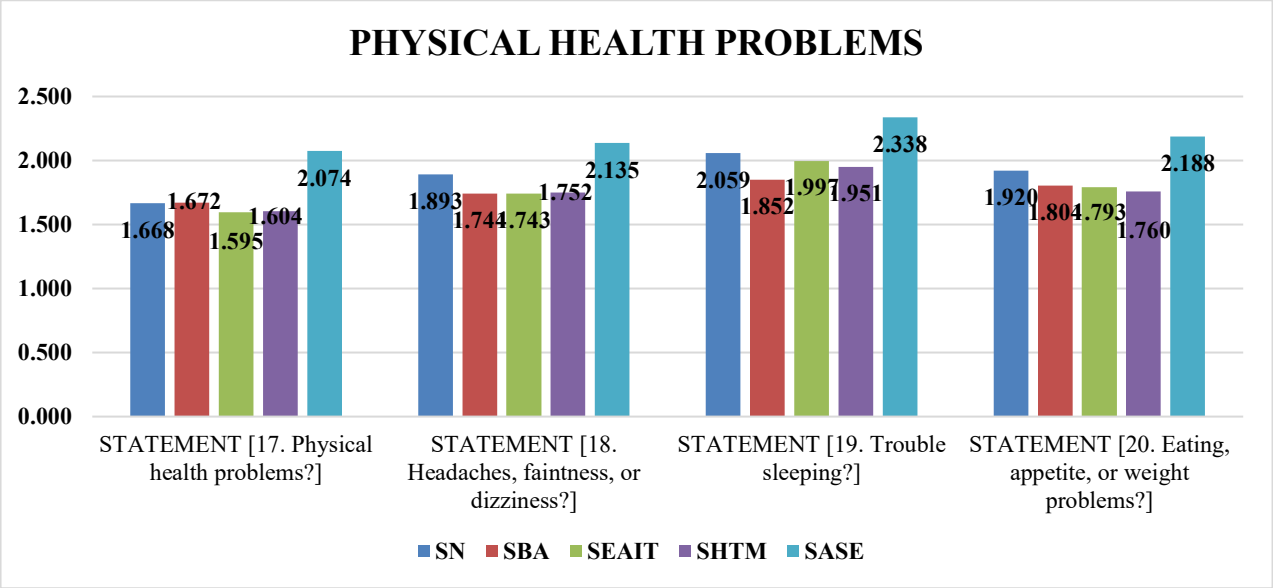
The results show that most students feel sadness, discouragement, and self-blame, but suicidal thoughts are uncommon. It's important for DWCL to provide mental health support, reduce stigma around seeking help, and encourage self-care to address these feelings and prevent them from becoming more serious.

1.3 Anxiety



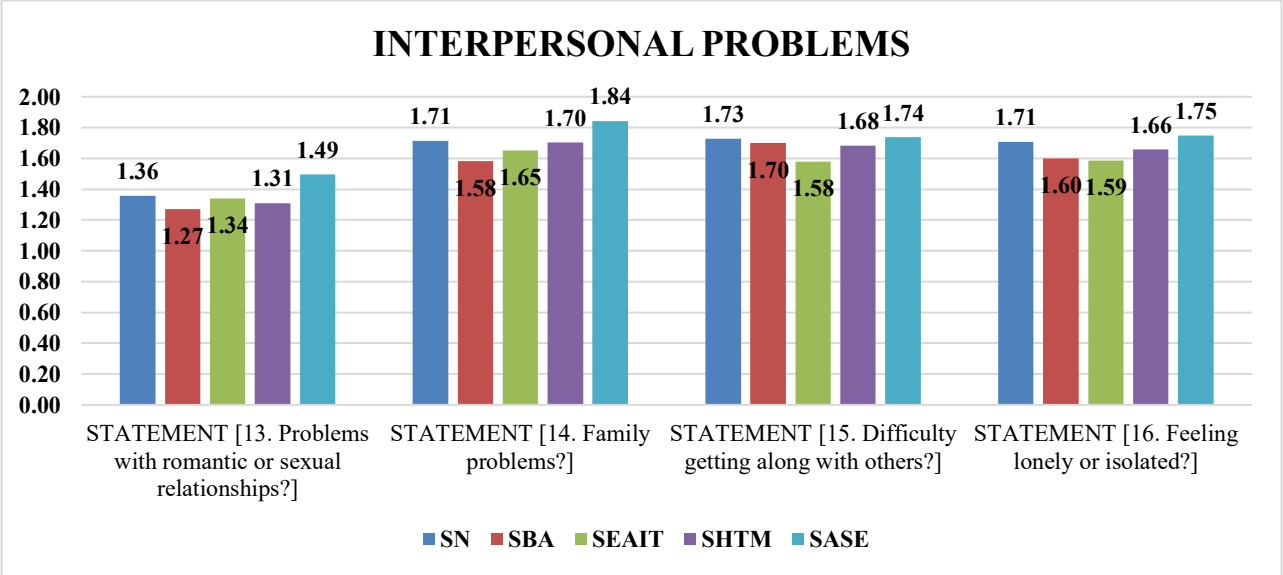
The results show that mild anxiety symptoms, such as nervousness and tension, are common among students. DWCL should offer resources for managing stress, teach coping strategies, and provide early intervention for those with more severe symptoms. Reducing stigma around mental health can encourage students to seek help when needed.

1.4 Physical health problems



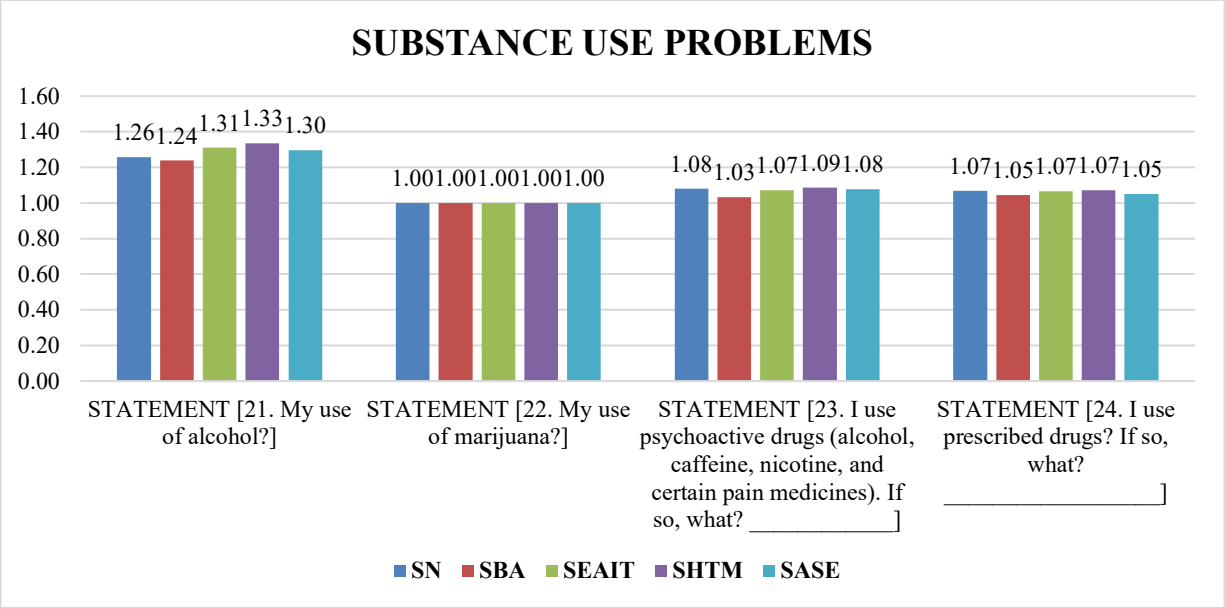
Most students report minimal physical health concerns, but sleep disturbances, headaches, and mild issues with appetite or weight are more common for some. These findings suggest the need for DWCL to promote good sleep hygiene, stress management, and healthy lifestyle habits. Providing resources like counseling for stress-related physical symptoms and access to health services could help address these issues and improve students' overall well-being.

1.5 Interpersonal problems



Students report low levels of interpersonal problems, including issues with romantic relationships, family, social interactions, and loneliness. These concerns are generally minimal, suggesting that interpersonal relationships are not a significant source of distress for most students.

1.6 Substance use problem



Students across all colleges reported low levels of alcohol use (around 1.24–1.33) and no reported use of marijuana (1.00). The use of psychoactive substances (such as caffeine, nicotine, or pain medicines) and prescribed drugs was also very minimal (close to 1.0), suggesting that substance use among students is generally rare or seldom practiced.

The study revealed varying levels of concern across the six domains assessed by the Inventory of Common Problems. The highest concern was found in academic problems (M = 1.9915), suggesting that students experience considerable difficulties in managing coursework, coping with academic stress, and sustaining motivation. This was followed by concerns in anxiety (M = 1.8844), physical health problems (M = 1.8770), and depression (M = 1.8413), which together highlight the strong interconnection between mental health and physical well-being. Interpersonal problems registered a moderate level of concern (M = 1.5994), reflecting challenges in relationships and social adjustment, while substance use emerged as the lowest concern (M = 1.1045), indicating that it is not a widespread issue among respondents. Overall, the results demonstrate that academic, mental health, and physical health issues constitute the primary areas of concern, pointing to the need for holistic interventions that address both academic performance and student well-being.

SOP 2. What institutional intervention can be derived to enhance students' well-being?

Academic support

The study identified students' challenges with academic workload and time management. Supporting literature confirms that effective peer tutoring significantly enhances academic performance and self-efficacy in diverse educational contexts. For instance, a 2025 study demonstrated that peer tutoring

improves secondary school biology students' learning outcomes and confidence (Kareem et al., 2025). In a similar vein, nursing students similarly experienced improved academic performance and psychological empowerment through peer tutoring (PubMed, 2024). These findings substantiate the value of implementing a Peer Tutoring Squad, not just for learning support but also for fostering communal and academic resilience.

Mental health

Stress, anxiety, and mental health stigma were evident in the student findings, mirroring patterns documented in higher education (Serrano, Bautista, & Tan, 2023; David, Reyes, & Panganiban, 2021). Peer-based initiatives such as Active Minds—a U.S.-based student mental health nonprofit—have been empirically shown to reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behaviors across campuses (Active Minds evaluation study). Additionally, large-scale anti-stigma campaigns like California's Mental Illness Stigma Reduction initiative have demonstrated measurable gains in service utilization and mental health awareness (Collins et al., 2019). These evidence-based approaches align with the Catholic principle of cura personalis, emphasizing holistic, caring attention to each student.

Physical wellness

Concerns regarding physical activity and nutrition reflect global student wellness trends. Peer-reviewed studies affirm that structured exercise exponentially alleviates anxiety and depression symptoms in university populations (BMC Psychology, 2025; BMC Public Health, 2024)—both credible sources within mainstream academic channels. Meanwhile, healthy hydration and snack interventions remain backed by foundational research showing that accessible water stations reduce sugary beverage intake and support healthier student behaviors (Patel & Hampton, 2011; Kenney et al., 2015). Offering Campus Fitness Classes and Healthy Snack & Hydration Stations thus responds to physical well-being gaps with both current and enduring educational best practices.

Holistic approach to student formation

Taken together, the recommendations reflect a holistic response to the problems identified in the study, emphasizing integrated support across academic, mental, and physical domains. Strengthening these systems aligns with the institution's mission of forming students who are not only academically competent but also emotionally resilient, physically healthy, and spiritually grounded. This approach resonates with the Catholic educational philosophy of integral formation—the development of mind, body, and spirit—ensuring graduates are capable, responsible, and contributors to the common good.

Educational research corroborates this philosophy, showing that holistic development fosters better learning outcomes, emotional resilience, and long-term well-being (Shek & Hollister, 2022; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2021). Similarly, the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person, emphasizes nurturing mind, body, and spirit (Peters, 2014; Regis University materials). Institutions that implement integrated wellness programs consistently report higher student satisfaction, engagement, and deeper character formation (DeRuyter, 2017; Gubbels et al., 2020), providing further support for these multifaceted interventions.

Discussion

The study revealed that the most pressing concern among students of Divine Word College of Laoag revolves around academic problems. Many students described difficulties managing coursework, high academic stress, and feelings of underperformance. These reflect the consistent findings in previous research that academic stress is one of the most common issues among college students, often affecting their motivation and overall well-being (Alibudbud, 2021; Mokgele & Rothmann, 2022). This suggests that the institution needs to bolster its academic support initiatives in tutoring, mentoring, study skills workshops, and academic advising programs. These interventions can help students better cope with academic pressures and encourage successful learning outcomes (Laguador, 2022; Ballebas et al., 2024).

Alongside academic concerns, mental and physical health issues also emerged as significant. Students reported experiencing anxiety, symptoms of depression, and physical discomfort such as headaches, fatigue, and sleep disturbances. While these were generally mild, they are interconnected and may intensify if left unaddressed. This underscores the importance of holistic support services that include counseling, stress management programs, and wellness activities (Uy et al., 2022; Cabalza et al., 2022). The institution may consider offering regular wellness seminars, mindfulness activities, and promoting healthy lifestyle habits on campus. These programs not only support emotional health but also prevent stress-related physical issues from worsening.

Interpersonal concerns, including conflicts with family or peers, were present but less pronounced compared to academic or health-related issues. However, they still influence emotional stability and academic performance (Cleofas, 2019). Thus, fostering a strong sense of community through peer support groups, student organizations, and values-based formation programs remains essential. Substance-related problems were identified as the least concerning, indicating that substance abuse is not widespread among the students. Nonetheless, maintaining proactive education and preventive campaigns will help safeguard this positive situation (Aliganga et al., 2024; Sanson et al., 2022).

Differences emerged across academic departments, particularly with Nursing students showing higher levels of academic stress. This reflects the demanding nature of nursing programs, which combine intensive academic and clinical requirements (Lo & Lee, 2022). Programs such as Business or Hospitality reported relatively fewer concerns, showing variability in stress based on course demands. Regardless, feelings of underperformance remained a shared concern across departments (Datu & King, 2020). This implies that targeted interventions—such as program-specific academic support and faculty guidance—are necessary, especially in demanding academic fields.

Although symptoms of anxiety and depression were generally mild, early intervention and destigmatizing mental health services remain crucial. Creating safe spaces, normalizing counseling, and openly discussing mental health could encourage more students to seek help. Suicidal ideation was reported to be rare, yet mental health education and crisis response systems must still be prioritized as preventive measures. Physical health concerns, though not severe, signal the need to encourage healthy sleep habits, exercise, and balanced routines through campus wellness initiatives (Manea et al., 2020).

Students at DWCL face the most significant challenges in the areas of academics, mental health, and physical well-being. Interpersonal issues and substance-related concerns are less prominent but still warrant attention. These findings point to the need for a comprehensive and integrated student support system within the institution. By strengthening academic assistance, expanding mental health services, promoting wellness programs, and fostering a supportive campus culture, DWCL can nurture students who are not only academically competent but also emotionally resilient and holistically developed.

Conclusion

This study underscores the complex interplay between academic, psychological, and physical health concerns among Divine Word College of Laoag students. Anchored in Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), the findings reveal that the most pressing issues — academic problems, anxiety, and physical health complaints — are deeply interrelated (David et al., 2021; Alibudbud, 2021).

When students perceive that their academic demands surpass their available coping resources, stress manifests in emotional forms such as anxiety and depressive symptoms (Serrano et al., 2023; Ballebas et al., 2024), as well as physical discomforts (Cabalza et al., 2022; Uy et al., 2022). The relatively lower prevalence of interpersonal problems and substance use does not diminish their importance; even occasional difficulties can exacerbate other problems if left unchecked (Cleofas, 2019; Aliganga et al., 2024).

From a practical standpoint, results point to the need for integrated interventions. Academic workload adjustments, time management training, and accessible counseling services should form the cornerstone of DWCL's student support framework (Lim et al., 2024; Juchniewicz et al., 2024). Embedding mental health literacy in the curriculum and offering wellness programs can enhance resilience and coping capacity (Alibudbud, 2021; David et al., 2021).

Theoretically, the study affirms that student well-being in higher education is best understood through multi-dimensional frameworks. Stress and coping theories explain the onset of distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), cognitive models account for the persistence of depressive symptoms (Beck, 1976; Serrano et al., 2023), and biopsychosocial perspectives highlight the mind–body connection (Engel, 1977; Uy et al., 2022). This synthesis supports the argument that interventions should be equally multi-faceted.

In essence, the ICP functions as a diagnostic and strategic tool for institutional improvement. By refining assessment tools and support mechanisms, DWCL can foster a learning environment where academic rigor is balanced with holistic care, benefiting both academic performance and lifelong student well-being (Ballebas et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2024).

Author's Contribution:

Author: Pascua, Griselda I. administered the survey and assisted in gathering responses. She also contributed to the compilation and organization of the collected data.

Author: Guerrero, Gianne Lei, helped facilitate the administration of the survey and participated in collating the results. She supported the initial organization of the data for analysis.

Author: Macaspac, Libertine Gertrude analyzed and interpreted the data, integrated the findings, and consolidated the manuscript into its final written form. She ensured the logical flow, coherence, and alignment of the study's objectives and results.

Author: Damo, Jasheen Keith prepared the visual presentation of the findings by creating tables and graphical representations of the results. She also assisted in formatting and enhancing the layout of the manuscript.

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